



## **AN MERCOSUR UNIVERSITY Co-constructing transformation. Minas case, Lavalleja, Uruguay**

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**A UNIVERSITY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION FOR MERCOSUR. Proposal for its creation within the framework of *Territoriesnet*, the European Union and the Parliament of MERCOSUR: Case study for Minas, Lavalleja, Uruguay**

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## INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to put together the concepts of *sustainable development* and *transformation* with a great variety of activities –regarding different dimensions– that have the objective and goal of developing and transforming our societies and social groups, our territories and places in the local, sub-regional and regional scales in the most sustainable possible way? If this task is possible, could we achieve it while simultaneously maintaining scientific rigor and reaching institutions, organizations and citizens in such a way that they would adopt the outcome as their own? This is the first of a series of publications where we start answering these questions from complementary perspectives –political-institutional and scientific-academic– with common intentions.

This paper deals with an initiative for the creation of a Sustainable Development and Transformation University for MERCOSUR in the City of Minas, Uruguay, within the Program of Activities 2010-2015 of the *Territoriesnet* Global Network, particularly regarding the activities done by the *Territorios Posibles* Latin American Network; TAG, the scientific node that gave birth to it, as well as the European Network of Territorial Intelligence (ENTI), supported by the Framework Program 6 of the European Union. We also work with the Commission for Regional Sustainable Development [*Comisión de Desarrollo Regional Sustentable*] of the Parliament of MERCOSUR, with the Uruguay UNDP Articulation of Territorial Networks [*Articulación de Redes Territoriales (ART)*] Program, with various research groups in Uruguay: UCUDAL, UDELAR, CLAEH and FLACSO, with the Ibero-American General Secretariat [*Secretaría General Iberoamericana (SEGIB)*] and other initiatives that carry out activities with the same focus on science-society than the current proposal.

This writing is divided into two sections. The first one takes living and latent socio-cultural imprints from the local society, together with the political and social decision to transform the state of relative social and economic stagnation of Lavalleja in relation with Uruguay as a whole, especially during the last half century. The second describes matters related to what is understood by development and sustainable development, as well as diverse scopes and meanings of this concept to incorporate them to the debate on the generation of a macro-subject of study and transversal

intervention to a large number of scientific disciplines that will be useful and cohesive for the actions of this future institution of higher learning.<sup>1</sup>

## IMPRINTS, STAGNATION AND TRANSFORMATION

The momentum for the creation of this University emerges from the combination of local needs and political-institutional and scientific-academic will. The proposed venue, the City of Minas, has a population of 39,000 and is the capital of the Department of Lavalleja –a territory that encompasses an area one-third the size of Holland, 63,000 inhabitants and many natural resources: landscapes, water, minerals, agriculture and forests, among others. Three pillars justify the choice of this territory and society, in brief: socio-cultural **imprints**, economic **stagnation** and demographic exodus, and a **decision to transform** the current state of affairs.

**Socio-cultural imprints.** Remarkably valuable imprints and marks deeply rooted in Minas and Lavalleja are the pillar for the rescue of a culture that needs increased public awareness and repositioning –like those shared by previous generations in Lavalleja, Uruguay– on par with the current times. For almost the entire last century Lavalleja has been a cultural referent in Uruguay.

Minas was founded in 1783 for economic, military and political reasons. “The settlement of the town of Villa Concepción de las Minas implied an episode in the revitalizing epic of the Spanish colonist, and it is basically of European origin. The first immigrants were Spaniards: from Galicia, Asturias, the Canary Islands and other places that constituted the core of the culturization process. The French who emigrated from the Basque Provinces worked on craftwork; others became builders, smithies, etc. They brought with them their typical customs and created a small world that left its mark in the Uruguayan soil. The Italian were also present and offered their tongue to enhance the local and street languages of the villa, together with their food, religion, etc. By mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, other migratory contingents mixed with those of Latin origin: the English, German, Swiss, and before World War II, the Armenian and Lebanese. Today we can observe a diversity of races and families that descend from those migratory groups, whose contributions have been significant to the becoming of Minas history.”

The Department has been the birthplace of great artists, scientists and nationally, as well as internationally, famous personalities. The Music of Eduardo Fabini (1882-1950), distinguished national classical musician, who travelled all over Europe and the United States with works of his creation, such as "Campo" (Country) and "La isla de los ceibos" (The island of ceibos), among others. Juan José Morosoli, (1899-1957) narrative writer, whose works “Perico” and “Los albañiles de Los Tapes” (The bricklayers of Los Tapes) were translated to many languages. Also Guillermo Cuadri, Capagorry and Espínola Gómez (1921-1955). Many have been the renowned painters: Horacio Espondaburu (1855-1902) is considered the first of Minas’ painters. Alfredo Vidal y Fuentes (1863-1926) has published numerous national and international scientific works and held important positions in public health; he was the founder of institutions like the Isla de Flores lazaret house. The Ardao brothers, a philosopher and a historian, the Ardao sisters, María Julia, historian, and María Isabel, chemist, who discovered an antibiotic jointly with Clemente Estable, a scientist; their research was deepened at Harvard University in the 40's. Esperanza Viscay de Fuller, educator and founding teacher of the Solar de Artigas School in Paraguay. On the stage, the dancer José Otegui Paul went all over the main theatres in our country, the United States and Europe. He made it to Brussels and in 1954 to Paris, at the Marigny Theatre in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

Among the local initiatives oriented towards promoting social and environmental development and Culture, we may mention Minas Capital of Culture [*Minas Capital Cultural*] (1990), the Lolita Rubial (1991) Foundation –creator of the Museum of Comics [*Museo de la Historieta*]– an institution that brings out national cultural achievements by awarding prizes to renowned people of

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<sup>1</sup> This writing is divided into two sections: the concept of transformation associated to the management of the intended development, and co-constructing transformation with local society: first results (Peña, Girardot and Bozzano: 2010; IT-GO Conference Nantes-Rennes)

Uruguay's culture all over the country; the Amigos del Arte Association (1992) and more recently the UNI3 Continuous Adult Education University [*Universidad de Adultos de Educación Permanente*] (2001). Regarding environmental matters, the Ecological Group Arequita [*Grupo Ecológico Arequita (GEA)*] (1985) has worked on fruitful activities, mainly in environmental education for the community in the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. In Lavalleja there are many intermediate and nongovernmental organizations too.

The imprints, understood as invisible marks –practices, actions, symbols, events, myths– from a past in the present, and the marks, as visible traces of the first –museums, works, objects, products– are in Lavalleja a basic sediment, a fertile ground to recover, rescue and contribute to the awakening of the Department, recovering its main strengths but also knowing how to make them part of the future.

**Economic stagnation and second demographic exodus: the “segunda redota” (the second defeat).** The Redota –a gaucho expression for the word defeat (derrota)– was the name given by the locals to what was also called the “exodus of the Uruguayan people” in 1811, after the battle of Las Piedras against the Spanish Crown.<sup>2</sup> At the time, due to political reasons, between 18 and 20% of the Uruguayan population abandoned the country to march with Artigas; an event that could be considered an escape later became what would be the main imprint in the creation of Uruguay as a nation. A century and a half later, mainly due to economic and labor related issues, “...from the decade of 1960 a *second exodus* took place, which would transform Uruguay into the nation with the lowest rate of growth in all of Latin America: today, approximately 18% of the country's population lives outside of Uruguay. After being the *Switzerland of the Americas*, the nation started its path towards the *country of the exodus*: a country where the youth have lesser and lesser reasons to stay, to educate themselves, to work and to settle and form their families. To a great extent, this situation is experienced and perceived by a large number of Uruguayan people as a *second redota*, particularly because all remember from their parents and grandparents the golden age when living in Uruguay was different. Expectations have changed. The persistency of this *population drain* has contributed in half a century to institutionalize for our country a palpable concept in our society, sadly known as *the culture to emigrate*.” (Peña, 2007). Diverse authors point out a trend in Uruguay towards the “exporting of young and prepared minds”.<sup>3</sup>

In this *second exodus* or *second redota*, Lavalleja is sadly one of the leaders among the 19 Departments of Uruguay. For half a century, Lavalleja has neither increased nor decreased its population, an infrequent case for Latin America. Between the census of 1963 and 2006, the Department of Lavalleja has lost approximately 5,000 inhabitants: according to the National Census of Population, Lavalleja had a population of 65,823 in 1963; 65,180 in 1975; 61,466 in 1985; 60,743, in 1996; and 60,925 in 2004. The estimate for 2008 is 61,910 inhabitants.

Minas, its capital city, has a population of 37,149. It is the main economic, cultural, industrial, commercial, touristic and administrative center. The main localities in the Department are José Pedro Varela (4,983 inhabitants), with rice-growing, fodder and agricultural machinery manufacturing activities; Solís de Matajojo (2,509 inhabitants) where the main activities are meat processing, fishing and cattle raising; José Batlle y Ordóñez (2,298 inhabitants), Mariscal (1,507 inhabitants), Pirarajá (723 inhabitants), Zapicán (602 inhabitants), Colón (223 inhabitants) and Illescas (133 inhabitants); life in these six towns centers around agricultural and forest production.

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<sup>2</sup>After the battle of Las Piedras, a clash between the locals and the Spanish government in Montevideo, General Artigas had to retreat to the north. Even though the order was obeyed, it led to a collective decision that took the Uruguayans from every town, villa or hamlet to join the patriot and abandon homes and animals. Women, men, elders and children marched together in greater numbers with what little they had while burning crops and belongings to deny them to the Spaniards. They followed the hero in spite of his refusal, because this delayed his march; they spent 11 months in the north where Artigas showed his character of statesman. This could well be considered the foundational pact of the national sentiment of the Uruguayan people.

<sup>3</sup> Adela Pellegrini, Andrea Vigorito y Luis Aguiar, among others.

It is also worth mentioning a number of villages and rural places, mostly devoted to agricultural and/or forest production: Villa Serrana, Villa del Rosario, Aramendia, Estación Solis, Retamosa, Andreoni, Aguas Blancas, Marmarajá, Ombúes de Bentancor, Ortiz, Barrancas, Vejigas, Casupá, Los Tapes, Polanco, El Soldado, Barriga Negra, Campanero, Cerro Pelado, Higueritas, Gaetán, Godoy, Verdún, Ladrillos and Marco de los Reyes.

The economic activities in Minas are related, to a great extent, to the name that gave its origin to the City and the Department: the mines. Uruguay's Congressional Legislative Palace was built 103 years ago with marble from Minas' surroundings. There are also world class subterranean sources of mineral water and upwellings, like those exploited and marketed with notable success by the Salus Company at Fuente del Puma since 1898. In the past it used to be sold in pharmacies and in 1912 it obtained international awards in Europe for being one of the purest in the world. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of sustained economic development: we may point out the public railroads [*Administración de Ferrocarriles del Estado (AFE)*], two flour mills –Ugarte and Monasterolo– and the limestone quarry Diano. Lavalleya's industry diversified through the following decades with vinicultural businesses, sweets and food preserves, and dried red pepper for **paprika**. The Department's economic boom continued through 50's and the 60's; some large industries and open pit quarries started operating at this time, as well as small and medium-sized businesses. In the mid 70's a slow process of economic stagnation started, which would eventually lead to the closing of the marble, granite, dolomite and gold mines, and factories of importance to the local society, especially those of cardboard manufacturing and flour mills. The Uruguayan railroad decline, high industrial costs and the migration of the workforce from Lavalleya to more dynamic departments were the main factors of this economic stagnation. The last industry that established itself in the department did so 17 years ago: a shoe making factory, with local government support and Brazilian capitals.

Currently many of the community leaders and citizens are strongly determined to transform this harsh reality. The needs and expectations of the local societies from Minas and the various localities in the Department are central to changing this state of affairs: there is a will to develop new activities, to transform realities dominated by inertia and population exodus, mainly to Montevideo, Uruguay's seaside resorts and to other countries, especially to Spain, the United States, Australia and Argentina.

Minas and Lavalleya represent today a society with a significant cultural development in Uruguay that has been weakened by the exodus of its children and by local inertias; in the last few years, however, a large part of its inhabitants has become convinced that it is necessary to wake up.

**Decision to transform the present situation: the *four legs*.** This initiative is based on the combination of wills and decisions of social, politic-institutional, economic and academic-scientific actors, local as well as from other latitudes. *Four legs* are necessary to drive an initiative of this nature. If one of them teeters or weakens, or if more vertical or less participative styles of work are imposed, the decision may be taken anyway, but its germination, appropriation and projection will be more prone to failure. The conditions for achievement cannot be met just by intentions or decisions.

It is then necessary that the initiative goes through process controls, where top-down and bottom-up styles establish a dialog among the *four legs* that will not only help each participant to become more aware, but will also value his or her knowledge and know-how. One of the most important keys for the success of this enterprise lies there: territorial actors –social, economic, community– each sharing their knowledge and open to co-building with the contributions of politicians and academicians; the institutional actors, activating from their places vectors of decision that truly incorporate popular and scientific knowledge to legitimate transformation in a more solid way; and scientific actors *dismounting from their horses* and avoiding epistemic obstacles.

Probably the most difficult task will be that of placating and softening our epistemophilic obstacles, alive and latent from ancient times. There is no society without conflicts, contradictions, suspicion and differences; it is necessary to co-operate and complement each other, overcoming inertias and differences, it is part of the path that must be walked. This is a slow process of co-construction of trust between different actors, where we must incorporate win-win mindsets, rescuing the knowledge that provides for the best synergies. Confronting and reproducing conflict permanently, without mediating, co-constructing or agreeing supposes channeling time and energy to other types of development: a development in which conflict is a way of life. In this sort of scenarios, times and energies of politicians, scientists and the public will eventually die down and contribute to the lethargy and even inertia of every project of development and virtuous transformation.

For over a year there has been ongoing work, that has not lacked conflicts or obstacles, to develop and strengthen this *four legs*, to shape the initiative as a virtuous transformation; actions are taken simultaneously in three directions: with local actors, with political-institutional actors, and with academic-scientific actors.

Work with the local actors has followed three lines: 1) the creation of a Multi-sectorial Commission for University Development [*Comisión Multisectorial de Desarrollo Pro-Universidad*] in Minas; 2) the implementation of three survey models –Minas, inland towns and rural places– named: “Minas and Lavalleja: Past, present and future”, and 3) a record of projects and ideas for the development and transformation of Minas and Lavalleja. In these three lines participate people of all ages, from universities and other places, in brief, everyone that feels attracted to the project.<sup>4</sup>

In the last four years the political-institutional actors that drive the initiative have been opening doors in the most diverse institutional spaces, local, national and international, creating what today has become an institutional map of notable value due to the synergy oriented towards the achievement of the goal.

University and scientific actors work, as many, from research, outreach and teaching, connected with the extra-university world –institutions, organizations, citizenship– by places and possible territories more sustainable than the current ones. We would like to point out a great number of scientific and academic work experiences with territorial institutions and actors; among them, three decades linked to the activities of the collective constituted by 200 scientific, institutional and territorial actors that today make up the ENTI in eight European countries, which also performs activities in three other continents: Africa, Asia and North America. It is also worth mentioning the work conducted by the recently constituted TAG (Territory, Actors, Governance) Team, with headquarters at the National University of La Plata, which brings together 72 researchers and people with university education from different institutions and public and territorial actors who have been walking a path parallel to the European one for the last two decades.<sup>5</sup>

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTS**

Why a Sustainable Development University? In 1987 the Brundtland Report read: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Between Stockholm 1972 and Rio 1992 many things have happened, a whole lot more until Copenhagen 2009. Discourses and awareness have notably moved forward, but not enough has been seen in terms of concrete actions or results: the socio-ecologic transition seems to be a valid objective to guide action, if we keep in mind that

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<sup>4</sup> The opportunity to create a university center in Minas is neither new nor isolated; a large part of the local society has given its approval to it for the last few years. Even though the idea of a University of Development and Transformation was born as a local political initiative and as an academic initiative from other places, it was quickly shared with the entire society, without distinctions or partisanship.

<sup>5</sup> TAG UNLP, with headquarters in La Plata, is actually formed by Rafaela, Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Rosario, Paraná, Oberá, Mar del Plata, Quilmes and San Juan (Argentina), Minas (Uruguay), Santo Domingo (Dominicana), México D.F., San José (Costa Rica), Bogotá (Colombia), Talca (Chile), Maracaibo (Venezuela), Portoviejo (Ecuador) and other cities and towns, represented by universities, institutions and territorial actors.

100 thousand people die every day out of hunger or sickness, that there are over 212 million unemployed and that if our planet could talk, it would be quite angry with us.

The concept of sustainable development acquires value and applicability as we define in the first place the concept of development in nature and scope, so we can then evaluate the feasibility of the components and/or principles of sustainability that will be applied to each particular development we face and wish to implement. That is, in this new University, the meaning of sustainable development, starting from a generic cohesive concept built on five sustainability components – POETA– proposed by Guimaraes (2002)<sup>6</sup>, research and work will be conducted for their application to each development; this aims to building a bridge between real development and virtuous transformation, thus accomplishing its goal. That is why the University will be a Sustainable Development and Transformation one.

At the same time, development –together with other numerous words– is being investigated and acted upon from a wide range of disciplines and inter-disciplinary fields of education. We agree with Sergio Boisier, we face “... an increasing conversion of development as a noun into an adjective, this creates not only confusion but also a *tautologization* of the concept” (Boisier; 2003:1). Today it is very clear that the concept of *development* is not the one from the 50’s and the 60’s, we must reduce this *tautologization*.<sup>7</sup>

In a broad sense, from the scientific-academic world, we understand development as an inclusive concept from about 30 disciplines and activities; among them local, endogenous, neighborhood, urban, tourist, regional, territorial, environmental, institutional, strategic, municipal, community, social, cultural, educational, health, rural, agricultural, livestock, forest, mining, commercial, industrial, railroad, road, port, decentralized, capillary, micro-entrepreneurial, entrepreneurial and many other forms of development. And as if that weren't enough, all of them sustainable.

Is it possible to group together these about 30 *developments* and other ones? Following the shape of Venn diagrams and as concrete projects are included, a swarm of groupings are being built where today it is possible to recognize, broadly speaking and in a preliminary and provisional way, six groups or lines of development. In all cases these are preferentially and non-exclusively, the following groups: 1-local, 2-regional, 3-social, 4-economic, 5-institutional and 6-sectorial.<sup>8</sup>

Is there anything shared by knowledge and activities related to sustainable development? Matters, problems and subjects referred to *transformations* derived from diverse types of *development*, it seems quite clear that they have different features depending on a large range of subjects of study and inter- and trans-disciplinary crossings. They do, however, share some common characteristics: processes of transformation of heterogeneous and complex realities –in the micro, meso and macro scales– are conceived, designed, built, negotiated, agreed, and implemented –not without conflicts or contradictions– by specific actors in specific places; and even though it may seem obvious, they are not realized by other actors or in other places.<sup>9</sup>

Particular combinations of processes, actors and places constitute a mortar: they are the *leitmotiv* and theoretical and ideological basis for this initiative that intends to co-construct sustainable processes of development and transformation in a democratic way, with social and environmental principles preferably oriented towards the disadvantaged.

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<sup>6</sup> Guimaraes (2002) “...we may propose that sustainability for a community depends of the interconnections among: population (size, composition, density, demographic dynamics); social organization (patterns of production, social stratification, patterns of conflict resolution); environment (physical as well as built environment, environmental processes, natural resources); technology (innovation, technical progress, use of energy); and social aspirations (patterns of consumption, values, culture)”

<sup>7</sup> We suggest a text by Sergio Boisier “Desarrollo (local): De qué estamos hablando?” op.cit

<sup>8</sup> A version of this “swarm” in the shape of Venn diagrams may be seen at [www.territoriosposibles.org](http://www.territoriosposibles.org).

<sup>9</sup> A Research Program for 2010-2012 is being prepared in *Territoriesnet* for the mapping and systematization of processes, places and actors regarding these *four legs* –academic-scientific, political-institutional, socio-territorial and economic-territorial—as well as all types of development that can be found in the bibliography and, simultaneously, different types of transformation, considering where it would be operating and/or should be promoted.



Social, economic, employment, educational, local, regional, territorial, environmental and many other problem groups are studied, analyzed and explained as scientific knowledge with the express intention of discovering the real possibilities for change and/or transformation that each subject of research carries in itself, in its potential condition as a target for intervention. This is all about creating scenarios of territorial governance with scientific rigor in the micro, meso and macro scales between the scientific-academic world, government institutions and a diverse range of territorial actors. These concerns exist in our public governmental institutions –local, regional and national– usually related with the instrumentation of policies and programs in diverse scales that have an impact on vulnerable populations and environments. Also, a growing number of social and local and international community organizations include these as their main concerns.

As Costamagna has stated: “There are a large number of challenges, the systemic and integral view of the concept, the links between different levels of government and policies within the same levels, bonds, networks and information, economic resources and municipal autonomies, among others. In this sense, the training of human resources for this challenge and increasing the links between academics, the scientific-technological system and the territory deserve a separate mention, an absolutely necessary encounter for the Development of the countries in the Region in the next years.”<sup>10</sup>

This initiative intends to be an open and fruitful field of experimentation within the framework of the *Territoriosnet* International Network, due to the driving force of two of its networks: Territorios Posibles and ENTI, although open to other networks. We hope to little by little create a beacon that will give out the emerging results to a wide collective of researchers with open and powerful communication guidelines, where scientists as well as politicians and the territorial actors involved will be present with their discourses and actions. It will be the combination of the trajectories of the participating groups and lines of research at the university, together with the answer to the needs, interests and expectations of the territorial and institutional actors, what will gradually create the profiles of this institution of higher learning. The current reality indicates that all of Minas and Lavalleya summon and attract tourist, cultural, mining and rural development, among other vocations latent in their society and territory.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview to Pablo Costamagna, September 2009.

<sup>11</sup> The extended references may be consulted at [www.territoriosposibles.org](http://www.territoriosposibles.org).



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